

K E S T R E L.

Falco tinnunculus, *Linn.*

Le Faucon cresserelle.

THIS indigenous Falcon is by far the most common species of those inhabiting Europe, over the whole of which continent it is universally diffused, as well as in those portions of Asia and Africa which are either immediately connected with or otherwise opposed to its shores; the whole of the northern parts of the latter country affording it a natural habitat.

Although we believe that the *Falco tinnunculus* has not been discovered in America, still that extensive continent has produced several species whose form and colouring unite them to the Kestrels of the Old World, and, as we before stated in the description of the Lesser Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculoïdes*), they appear to form one of the most natural groups in the family of *Falconidæ*.

The Kestrel may be daily observed making its graceful flights over fields and barren grounds in search of its natural food, which consists of mice, frogs, small birds and insects, while in pursuit of which its attention is often suddenly arrested, and poising itself in the air, which it fans with its long and pointed wings, it suddenly pounces down upon its victim with the utmost impetuosity, and may be frequently seen rising from the ground with its prey firmly fixed in its talons, and flying off to some retired situation to devour it, or, if in the season of incubation, conveying it to its young.

The male at the age of three years, when it is in full plumage, is adorned with the most delicate and sober colours, added to which it possesses a perfect symmetrical contour of body,—circumstances unquestionably ranking it as one of the most beautiful species of its genus. The female after the first moult undergoes no change; and the young males until after the age of two years are not distinguishable from her: this is the cause that so large a proportion of the birds bear the plumage just referred to, since but comparatively few survive the second year of their existence.

The birds of this division are of a more feeble character and less courageous disposition than the nobler groups of the *Falconidæ*; and, though easily tamed, cannot be used in the chase with sufficient certainty, notwithstanding the assertion of authors that they were formerly trained to the capture of Snipes and Partridges. They frequently take possession of the deserted nest of a Crow or Magpie for the purpose of incubation, yet it is far from uncommon for them to deposit their eggs on the bare surface of a ledge of rocks:—these eggs are from four to six in number, of a reddish brown colour with darker speckles or blotches, varying considerably in intensity. The young, like most of the nestlings of the hawks, are for the first month entirely clothed with a white down.

In the adult male, the bill, the tail (with the exception of a bar of black near the extremity of its feathers which terminate in white), the rump, and the fore-part of the head are of a fine blueish grey; the back and wing-coverts of a reddish fawn colour, each feather having at its extremity an arrow-shaped spot of black; primaries dark brown, their edges lighter; breast, belly and thighs of a pale cream-colour tinged with brown, and sprinkled on the breast with brown spots of a linear form, but assuming a rounder shape on the lower part of the body.

In the female, the whole of the upper parts and tail are of a browner hue than those of the male, each feather having several bars of a dark brown, and the tail likewise barred with brown, but terminating with a black band and white tips as in the male; the primaries are also brown with paler edges; the whole of the other parts resemble the male.

The Plate represents a male and female about three fourths of their natural size.